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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000474

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TAGS: PGOV PREL AJ IR

SUBJECT: IRAN ELECTION: BAKU RALLY FOR MOUSAVI; ISFAHAN
ELECTION UPDATE

REF: A) BAKU 464 B) BAKU 175

Classified By: POLECON COUNSELOR ROBERT GARVERICK, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Baku Iranians Rally for Mousavi

¶1. (C) Iranians in Baku held a relatively sedate, "invitation-only" election rally at an auditorium at Khazar University for Mir Hussein Mousavi on June 9. This rally, held with the permission of the GOAJ, was the only such political rally held for any Iranian Presidential candidate in Azerbaijan. The rally was closed to foreigners, however Iran watcher was able to separately persuade two contacts to attend and report on the proceedings, and also talked to other attendees. The contacts reported that approximately 200 supporters attended the two-hour rally, listening to pro-Mousavi speeches and watching several short films about Mousavi.

¶2. (C) According to attendees, the leading pro-Mousavi speaker was Dr. Javad Heyat, a famous Iranian heart surgeon and publisher of a Tabriz-based literary magazine. Attendees said that after praising Mousavi's competence and honesty, Heyat confessed that "the strongest reason I am supporting him is that he has promised to permit the use and teaching of (the Azeri language) in our schools." Baku participants appeared to be mainly Azeri, and the Azeri language was used by some of the speakers (Note: Mousavi himself is an ethnic Azeri, and has great support among ethnic Azeris - see ref (A). End Note.

Accentuating the Positive

¶3. (C) Attendees reported that the rally speeches carefully avoided criticism of Mousavi's rivals, and instead focused on positive comments about Mousavi and "the need for change." The auditorium was decorated with posters of Mousavi with former President Khatami, and several pro-Mousavi banners. In a reference to Mousavi's impeccable religious credentials, participants were handed small green flags (the Mousavi campaign's colors) inscribed with the motto "from one Hussein to another." The mostly young audience periodically responded to the pro-Mousavi speeches and mentions of his goals by waving these flags, and chanting Mousavi's name and campaign slogans. The rally also featured live bands and singers playing traditional Iranian music, and pop music popularized by Iranian bands in Los Angeles.

Embassy Officer Runs Rally

¶4. (C) According to Iranian student contacts, the rally was organized as a "personal initiative" by Safa Naveed, a young Baku-educated Revolutionary Guard officer who works as the liaison with Iranian students at the Iranian Embassy in Baku and allegedly spies on the Iranian student community here (ref b). Naveed was prominent during the rally, wearing a

green armband and ordering people around. According to student contacts, Naveed used funds provided by the Mousavi campaign to pay for the hall and musicians. No photographs were allowed, and in one discordant incident one attendee known to Iran watcher was ostentatiously expelled from the event by Naveed for the "crime" of photographing a Mousavi campaign poster pasted on the wall. Naveed personally deleted the harmless photo before expelling the offending attendee. Interlocutors also noted the presence of several hefty, tough-looking types who appeared to have come with Naveed as security. (Comment: It is unclear if Naveed's actions reflected nervousness about organizing the event, concern about the reaction of the GOAJ, his personal character, or all three. End Comment).

Election Comments From Isfahan

¶ 15. (C) An Isfahan-origin Iranian businessman who is a close Baku-watcher contact related a June 10 telephone conversation with his brother in Isfahan. The brother attended the huge pro-Mousavi end of campaign rally in Isfahan attended by Mohammed Khatami. He estimated attendance at this rally as "at least 200 thousand." The brother reported that after the rally several thousand Karroubi supporters mingled jovially with the Mousavi-ites, with individuals from both sides embracing and shaking hands. He related that large numbers of people roamed the city in cars and on foot, honking horns, and chanting slogans (including "Mousavi Azadi" (which ambiguously suggests "Mousavi equals," or "Mousavi and," Freedom)).

BAKU 00000474 002 OF 002

¶ 16. (C) Although pleased and impressed by the Isfahan turnout, the Baku contact also related that his brother has recently driven through several rural areas near Isfahan and in several cases seen nothing but Ahmadinejad posters and banners along village main streets. His brother did not know why there were so few posters of other candidates, but speculated that their rural supporters are lying low, and/or that rival posters are soon pulled down. The brother's observations may reflect both the bedrock support, and the bedrock political organizations, of Mousavi and Ahmadinejad.

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